

types of reforms are best for their constituencies.

This "patient-driven" approach—with insurance reforms and changes in the tax treatment of health insurance—should make health insurance more affordable. And it should significantly reduce the number of the uninsured.

During my tenure in the Senate, I have sought to build bridges between Republicans and Democrats. I believe that there are times where Republicans and Democrats need to come together to produce results.

An example of my efforts to work in a bipartisan manner is the bipartisan SCHIP legislation that was overwhelmingly passed by this body. In the spirit of bipartisanship, I join Senator WYDEN in cosponsoring the Healthy Americans Act. The Healthy Americans Act is a "patient-driven" approach to reforming our health care system.

While I support this "patient-driven" approach, I have serious concerns about a number of the provisions of the Healthy Americans Act. For example, like many of the Democratic Presidential candidates, the act would require all individuals to buy health insurance. I support accessibility to private insurance and differ with my colleagues on this point. Also, Senator WYDEN's approach is more regulatory than I would prefer.

In addition, I am not endorsing the repeal of the noninterference clause in Medicare Part D. That is not going to be on the table. So my cosponsorship is not an endorsement of these elements. Instead, I am cosponsoring the Healthy Americans Act to add my voice to the call for significant changes in our health care system.

What we have here is Republicans and Democrats coming together to solve a problem. This is what bipartisanship is all about. We are all on the same page when it comes to the big picture; that is, reforming our health care system and expanding access to health insurance.

We have serious problems, and we need serious people to solve them. So let's put politics aside, roll up our sleeves and work in a bipartisan way to reform our health care system.

Make no mistake, my cosponsorship of the Healthy Americans Act is only one step in the process. I intend to work with Senators BURR, COBURN, MARTINEZ, CORKER, and DOLE on their health care reform proposal. I intend to work with Chairman BAUCUS and members of the Senate Finance Committee on small business health reforms, along with more comprehensive health care reform proposals like the Healthy Americans Act. Let's get serious.

#### HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH

Mr. DOMENICI. Mr. President, I wish today to pay tribute to the contributions of Hispanic Americans as we commemorate Hispanic Heritage Month. This occasion welcomes the oppor-

tunity to celebrate the achievements made by Hispanic Americans to enrich the culture and day-to-day life of the United States.

Today, there is no denying the strength and impact of Hispanic Americans, who are now more than 40 million strong. In my home State of New Mexico, 44 percent of the total population is made up of people of Hispanic descent, which according to the Census Bureau, is the largest proportion of any State in the Union. What has truly been remarkable to me over the years is the extent to which the Hispanic community has thrived in every facet of civic life.

For instance, I am proud to call attention to the remarkable achievement of PFC José F. Valdez, one of 48 Hispanic American Medal of Honor recipients. Born and raised in Governador, NM, José served during World War II near Rosenkrantz, France. He heroically saved the lives of his fellow comrades by engaging in a firefight which allowed the soldiers to escape after an enemy counterattack. Similar tales of bravery are prevalent in the history of Hispanic Americans, who have served with distinction in every U.S. military campaign including our current engagements in Iraq and Afghanistan.

In the areas of science, medicine, sport, art, business, and public service, the various achievements of the Hispanic community are immeasurable. This year, Hispanic Business magazine celebrated its 25th anniversary by profiling 500 of the largest Hispanic-owned companies in the United States, a nearly tenfold increase from the magazine's initial listing in 1982. These companies boast total revenues of \$36.6 billion, which is a sizable contribution to the American economy.

Twenty-five of these top-ranked companies join me in calling New Mexico their home. At the top of this list is Manuel Lujan Agencies from Albuquerque, NM, which has also been awarded "Most Admired Company" by New Mexico's top 100 private companies. Also included in this list is Centinel Bank of Taos in Taos, NM, which is one of the very few minority-owned financial institutions in the United States. I am pleased that Manuel Lujan Agencies and Centinel Bank of Taos are joined by such firms as Roses Southwest Papers, Applied Tech Associates, Network and Sparkle Maintenance Inc. The fact, is Hispanics in New Mexico today lead a growing number of firms that help set the pace for a growing economy in my State, and many of them are firms involving high technology, construction, and service industries.

While there is no doubt that Hispanics have fought to protect our freedoms and made advancements in the corporate world, they are also leaving their imprint on the world of entertainment through sports and the arts. Of the athletes currently playing in the National Football League, 24 players are of Hispanic descent. These players

are represented on 16 teams across the country, and during a recent football matchup, Grammy winners Gloria Estefan and the musical group Ozomatli performed the national anthem at the halftime show in honor of this month's celebration. In my home State, music legends like Al Hurricane and the popular Tobias Rene add to the rich cultural contributions being made to our society.

I encourage Americans to take this moment to remember all of the areas of our society that have been influenced by the Hispanic community. I would also like you to recall the sacrifices Hispanics have made to preserve the liberties and freedom that make America a beacon of hope to millions around the world. These men and women have stood up as proud Americans and volunteered to protect their families and communities during the global war on terror. Our Nation is stronger because of these men and women. They deserve the gratitude of the Nation for their sacrifices.

The tradition of Hispanic Heritage Month dates back almost 40 years. In 1968, Congress started by designating a week to celebrate Hispanic heritage. By the early 1980s, we decided to extend the designation to cover a month starting on September 15. The extra time has been a necessary and appropriate change to allow us to recognize the long record of contributions Hispanic Americans have made to our communities and to our Nation. I call on the American people to join with all children, families, organizations, communities, churches, cities, and States across the Nation to observe the month with appropriate ceremonies and activities.

#### COMMENDING JIM NICHOLSON

Mr. ALLARD. Mr. President, it is my distinct pleasure to recognize my friend and fellow Coloradan Jim Nicholson. Although it is with sadness that his resignation takes effect this week, I would like to take this time to commend him for his service as the Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Jim is a veteran's veteran. As a West Point graduate, Army Ranger, highly decorated Vietnam war veteran, and 4 years of service as the ambassador to the Holy See, Jim was well prepared and highly qualified for the duties as the Secretary of Veterans Affairs. Jim was nominated by President Bush to serve as Secretary in December of 2004 and was subsequently confirmed unanimously by the Senate. The confidence bestowed upon Jim Nicholson by the President and all of those who gather here speaks to his unassailable ability to assist our veterans. Sworn into office on February 1, 2004, Jim readily assumed his role as the primary advocate for veterans.

Jim accepted control of the VA at an extremely difficult time and has proven himself to be the right man for the